



12

IMPLEMENTATION

In order to develop and implement the Comprehensive Master Plan's goals and recommendations, the Division of Planning and Development (DPD) will coordinate the following detailed planning studies and develop the following specific program proposals.

In addition to the projects listed below, the Master Plan should be utilized by various City officials and other members of the community to inform decision making about municipal policies and activities, including, expenditures, grant funding, capital projects, property dispositions, and the review of development proposals.

The timetables listed are meant to be a guide to identify those projects which will be given the most aggressive attention first. It is likely that steps will be taken on many of these projects throughout the life of the plan. The first five years of implementation are emphasized because the plan should be comprehensively updated every five years with a focus on a new 20-year window.

12.1 Years 1 & 2

12.1.1 MUNICIPAL OPERATIONS

The City of Lowell MIS department is presently engaged in a comprehensive assessment of municipal operations with an ultimate goal of streamlining and modernizing the delivery of City services and management of municipal data and information utilizing a variety of technology resources. This effort is consistent with the Master Plan's goals of improving the quality of life for Lowell's residents and creating an environment that is attractive and desirable for members of the creative community. Where appropriate, the recommendations of the Master Plan should also be incorporated into this process.

Contact: Assistant City Manager/Operations & Chief Information Officer, MIS

12.1.2 CAPITAL PLANNING

The vision, goals, and recommendations of this Master Plan should be used to inform a comprehensive plan for capital bonding and expenditures over the next 5-7 years. In Lowell, the requirements associated with the EPA mandated separation of all storm drainage and sanitary sewers will have a substantial impact on capital bonding capacity. This factor reinforces the importance of creative and thorough planning for capital expenditures associated with the implementation of the Plan. In addition to prioritizing municipally bonded capital projects, capital planning should include an assessment of lifecycle costs for operating municipal facilities, environmental management systems, and infrastructure maintenance planning. This planning should also explore the potential benefits and other implications of creating and designating independent authorities with separate bonding capacities for certain development activities.

Contact: Chief Financial Officer, City Manager's Office & Chief Planner, DPD

12.1.3 ZONING AND LAND-USE REGULATION

A primary tool to guide and facilitate the implementation of the Master Plan's goals and vision is the City's package of land use regulations, including the Lowell Zoning Code. Concurrent with the Master Plan process, the City of Lowell has engaged a consulting attorney to prepare revisions to the zoning code, subdivision regulations, and project review processes that will provide a framework and structure to encourage development activity that is consistent with the Master Plan and discourage inappropriate and incompatible projects that are potentially detrimental to the Community's goals and character.

Contact: Chief Planner, DPD & Building Commissioner, Inspectional Services

12.1.4 THE ACRE AND JAM URBAN RENEWAL PLANS

Development plans for these two designated urban renewal areas have been approved. The continued successful implementation of these two revitalization projects is an important step toward realizing the goals of the Master Plan, especially as articulated in Chapters Three, Four, Eight, and Ten. Where appropriate, revisions to these two plans may be proposed and considered to strengthen their consistency with the Master Plan vision.

Contact: Urban Renewal Manager, DPD

12.1.5 ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

The Lowell Wastewater Treatment Plant has been nationally recognized and certified for its environmental management system. As a result of a pilot project launched in the late 1990s, the plant has significantly reduced energy consumption, waste generation, and implemented more sustainable practices into nearly all aspects of its operation. The result has been environmentally beneficial, but also a significant cost savings to the City. Building on this model and financed by a grant obtained by the Lowell Health Department, the City will explore developing and instituting comprehensive environmental management practices on other municipal facilities, including one or more school buildings.

Contact: Health Director, Lowell Health Department, Assistant Business Manager, Lowell School Department

12.1.6. HOUSING STRATEGY AND POLICY

The Division of Planning and Development is currently in the process of developing the Housing Strategy and Policy for the City of Lowell, and the first draft of the document will be available for public review soon after the release of the final Master Plan. The purpose of the Housing Strategy and Policy is to expand on the broad themes and goals set forth in Chapters Three and Four of the Master Plan to outline specific objective and guidelines for residential development in Lowell during the next five years.

A key theme of the Housing Strategy will be the concept of Lowell as a "lifetime city", a place that provides housing and residential amenities for people at all stages of life and all incomes. The report will address issues of affordability, fair housing choice, and future housing development by examining current and forecasted demographic statistics, land use and assessor's data, public opinion research, and housing market conditions.

Contact: Community Development Director, DPD

12.1.7 TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

The area surrounding the Gallagher Terminal possesses one of the most significant opportunities for transit oriented development in the City of Lowell and a key target destination for future development to support the Master Plan's goals and objectives, including reducing development and traffic pressures on established neighborhoods. A master plan for this area must be completed to help determine appropriate boundaries for an overlay district and identify opportunities to integrate a transit oriented development area with the abutting urban fabric. The overlay regulations will inform the location and type of development that could occur. In addition, the plan will outline a residential and economic development strategy, which links public and private funding sources with proposed transportation enhancements and desired improvement projects.

Contact: Associate Planner, DPD

12.1.8 THE PAWTUCKETVILLE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

The largest concentration of the existing developable land that was identified in the Master Plan is located in the Pawtucketville neighborhood. As a result, this area faces strong and growing development pressures and merits a more detailed study. In order to create a unified vision for this neighborhood's future, the Division of Planning and Development, in partnership with neighborhood residents, institutional partners, and community groups, will develop a neighborhood action plan specifically for Pawtucketville. The plan will develop specific recommendations concerning transportation, open space preservation, housing, and commercial development as well as institutional expansion and the protection of natural resources.

Contact: Neighborhood Planner, DPD

12.1.9 WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

In Chapter Five, the rivers and canals of Lowell are described as one of the City's greatest resources and the property along the waterways provides the greatest opportunity for unique and desirable residential and commercial development. These new projects must foster strong connections to existing neighborhoods with the goal of increasing visual and physical access to the rivers and canals for current and new residents, as well as visitors exploring Lowell for the first time. Development of these areas must also be carefully managed to insure that the key natural and historic assets are enhanced and not damaged by development activity. Design standards and overlay development districts should be established to both promote and carefully regulate the utilization of these resources. The Division of Planning and Development has engaged a consultant to propose a package of standards and illustrate waterfront development possibilities in conformance with these standards using the Concord River frontage in the Lower Belvidere and Back Central neighborhoods as a model.

Contact: Design Planner, DPD

12.1.10 DOWNTOWN PLAN

Chapter Six focuses on Lowell's downtown. A more detailed plan for this area was crafted by the Division of Planning and Development in partnership with downtown stakeholders. The continued implementation of this plan and its development recommendations is a key component of the execution of the Master Plan vision, especially the promotion of Lowell's unique assets as a resource for the members of the creative community.

Contact: Economic Development Director, DPD

12.1.11 CONCORD RIVER GREENWAY PROJECT

The Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust is working to create a greenway park along the Concord River, protecting valuable natural resources while fostering recreational opportunities. This project will also link the City's largest park area, Shedd Park and Rogers Fort Hill Park, to the Downtown area and a network of walkways that have been developed by the Lowell National Historic Park. In addition, the project will incorporate an integral part of the Bay Circuit Trail, which will link together a network of trails around greater Boston.

To help enhance and strengthen this project, the Division of Planning and Development will continue its partnership with the Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust to identify funding sources and facilitate implementation activities, including the design and construction of a neighborhood trail that will form the backbone of the Greenway.

Contact: Environmental Officer, DPD

12.1.12 CULTURAL ORGANIZATION OF LOWELL STRATEGIC PLAN

The Cultural Organization of Lowell will spearhead an effort to develop a strategic plan to guide the implementation of many of the recommendations in Chapter Seven as well as for its own organizational development. This project will focus on cultivating the City of Lowell as a destination for culture and the arts, promoting existing museums and venues for the visual and performing arts, and developing additional complementary facilities that can expand the range of cultural and artistic offerings in the community.

Contact: Executive Director, Cultural Organization of Lowell

12.1.13 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION

Many of the recommendations of Chapters Seven and Eight will be facilitated by the creation of a workforce development council that includes representatives from City and state agencies, local education institutions, employment training organizations, business organizations, and some of the region's employers. The formation of this organization will result in a coordinated effort to address the ongoing workforce training needed to help Lowell achieve and retain a position of prominence in the ever-changing creative economy.

Contact: Economic Development Director, DPD

12.2 Years 3-5

12.2.1 RETAIL CORRIDORS

Chapter Nine defines a vision and goals for Lowell's regional retail corridors, including Rogers Street, Middlesex Street, Chelmsford Street, and portions of Bridge Street. In order to realize this vision, more detailed study of these areas is needed to define specific site planning standards for shopping plazas and stand-alone establishments as well as area-specific development recommendations that will strengthen the viability of these areas to support regional retail while improving their compatibility with and accessibility to neighboring residential areas.

12.2.2 NEIGHBORHOOD MAIN STREET COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS

The promotion of existing and potential neighborhood main street commercial districts is an important component of protecting neighborhood character and identity as well as achieving the goals of improving access to primary destinations that is articulated in Lowell's transportation vision. The local businesses in these districts also constitute an essential component of Lowell's employment and economic stability. Lowell should explore and adopt a locally-appropriate version of the Main Street program model that has been used by small towns nationwide and many cities, including Boston to support and strengthen these districts. Regulatory changes, merchant organization, and funding for physical improvements and marketing efforts, will be key components of an implementation program.

12.2.3 CROSS POINT

Lowell's Comprehensive Master Plan recommends promoting the further development of the area surrounding Cross Point Towers in an effort to create an "edge city". With its excellent transportation access, the Cross Point area offers an opportunity to develop a unique live-work environment with additional office space and new residential activity, complemented by retail services, restaurants and structured parking facilities which could accommodate significant growth while minimizing adverse impacts on Lowell's established neighborhoods. A more detailed examination of this area should be conducted resulting in recommendations for development opportunities and building partnerships with property owners to assist with the realization of this vision.

12.2.4 SUSTAINABILITY

Lowell pioneered the use of historic preservation to foster urban revitalization through heritage tourism during the 1970s and 1980s. Chapter Eleven suggests the opportunity for Lowell to once again emerge as a model for other cities by focusing on sustainable development and environmental sensitivity as tools for economic growth and development in an urban setting. Additional study is needed to better define compelling and unique applications of sustainable development practices and principles to an urban environment. Detailed recommendations for how this goal can be applied to industrial recruitment, municipal capital construction, and private development activity as well as the implications for quality of life improvements for Lowell residents need to be examined and developed.

12.2.5 PEDESTRIAN ACCESS

The need to expand pedestrian and bicycle access in Lowell is crucial to increasing the quality of life for both neighborhood residents and visitors. The ability to travel to one's intended destination without requiring an automobile helps to decrease traffic congestion and increase the visibility of pedestrians, and therefore increase the perception of Lowell as a vibrant, active community, with implications for retail business development, crime prevention, and overall desirability of the community.

DPD will conduct a transportation study that evaluates the City from the perspective of a person on foot or a bicycle, identifying priority routes and connections as well as existing impediments to the usage of these modes of travel over these corridors. This study will also recommend concrete policies and action steps that are needed to overcome existing obstacles and establish viable pedestrian and bicycle access among important destinations in and around Lowell.

12.2.6 BRIDGE CROSSINGS

A primary source of traffic congestion in Lowell, particularly at peak travel times, stems from the limited opportunities to cross the Merrimack River. Planning must begin in earnest to improve the traffic capacity of the City's river crossings. Due to the complexity of planning, engineering, and constructing new bridges and the required partnership between the Massachusetts Highway Department and the City, this process can take decades from conception to use.

The first step for easing Lowell's traffic congestion related to river crossings includes an analysis of traffic management on the existing and planned bridges both inside the City limits and in neighboring towns to identify opportunities to improve capacity without necessarily requiring additional construction.

Another important preliminary step will be to begin a feasibility study and environmental analysis for an expanded permanent crossing at the location of the temporary Rourke Bridge, where development pressures in Pawtucketville and in nearby communities as well as the pending opening of a widened Route 3, create a traffic demand that exceeds any possible solutions that rely solely on traffic management using existing roadways.

12.3 Years 6-20

12.3.1 COMPREHENSIVE MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Every five years following initial adoption, this Master Plan should be comprehensively updated. This update process should mirror the original planning process, incorporating data collection, public opinion research, visioning, and revisions to the overall plan to respond to the changing circumstances in Lowell that this research illuminates.

12.3.2 CAPITAL PLANNING

Like the Master Plan itself, capital planning should continue as an ongoing exercise to respond to ever-changing circumstances and priorities, but be informed by comprehensive capital plan updates every 5-7 years.

12.3.3 ZONING AND LAND USE REGULATION

Specific development proposals and pressures are continuously evolving, often necessitating minor zoning amendments. However, the City should conduct a comprehensive review of the impacts and success of zoning and land use policies in conjunction with the comprehensive updating of this Master Plan every five years. This review should inform a package of additional revisions to the Lowell Zoning Code where appropriate.

12.3.4 BRIDGE CROSSINGS

Building on the findings and recommendations of the feasibility analysis and environmental study, the design, engineering, funding, and construction of a new permanent bridge over the Merrimack River at or near the present location of the Rourke Bridge will commence.

12.3.5 OPEN SPACE PLAN UPDATE

The Division of Planning and Development recently completed an open space survey, which was funded by a grant from the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. The results of this survey were used to inform the Master Plan, the update to Lowell's Open Space Plan and to guide future park improvements. The next comprehensive update to the Open Space Plan should be assembled, incorporating a significant public opinion survey component.